# Nashik Dhama Yatra



*Nashik is one of the most principal places in the lila of Sri Sri Sita Ram Laxmana. It is here that Laxmana cut the nose of Surpanakha, the sister of demon Ravana. Nashik means "nose", and thus this city got its name. In Nashik at a very holy place called Panchavati, Sri Sri Sita Rama Laxmana spent about one year of their exile before Ravana kidnapped the mayaic expansion of Sita Devi from here. Exact spot where Sri Sri Sita Rama Laxmana lived in Panchavati (Kalaram Mandir), Ram Kunda where Lord Ramacandra used to take His bathe, Sita Gumpha where Laxmana hid Sita in this cave while Lord Rama fought with Khar, Dushan and their 14000 rakshas warriors, Tapovana where Laxmana performed tapasya to kill Ravana's son Meghnath (Indrajit) are in Nashik. This is the place of Dandakaranya forest as mentioned in Ramayana, Srimad-Bhagavatam 10.79.19-21 and Sri Caitanya Caritamrta Madhya lila 9.3.11-16.*

*Here in Nashik Gautama Muni had his ashram. It is the place where the river Godavari first having come to this earth from the higher realms begins its journey flowing eastwards to the ocean. Here at Nashik some of the most wonderful and famous pastimes of Laxmana, Ram and Sita took place. Nashik is also one of the four sites of the triennial Kumbha Mela. Trimakeshwar, one of the twelve Jyotirlingas is 35km away. This Jyotirlinga is extraordinary in several ways. It embodies all three of Trimurti together: Vishnu, Brahma and Siva. Place called Taket about 70km from Nashik is the place where Lord Rama met Jatayu the eagle bird, as per Valmiki Ramayana.*

*The glories of Pancavati-tirtha at Nashik are enumerated in Valmiki's Ramayana in the Aranya-kanda and in Sri Garga Samhita, "Twice as sacred as the mud of the Ganga is the dust of Citrakuta. Ten times more sacred than that is the dust of Pancavati-tirtha". Lord Balarama and Lord Nityananda came to this place and visited all of the Tirthas. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu during His South Indian tour also came here to Panchavati, Nashik and He went along the river Godavari back eastwards. Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu did wonderful kirtan, chanting, dancing, transforming everyone into Krishna prema while He was here, visiting all the holy places. The footprints of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu are in the Balaji Temple near Rama Kunda. ISKCON has a beautiful centre here.*

*With devotional, reverential mood, joyful mood, going to each of the places of the holy lila of the Lord and His devotees, we should be praying for their Mercy and praying for our own personal purification as well as the purification of all, because when devotees are pure in their service to the Lord then the Lord can empower them to purify all the world.*

*Nashik is in Maharashtra 3 hour drive from Mumbai and 4 hours from Pune (210 km). Mumbai and Pune are the nearest airports. Nashik is well connected by Rail and Bus transports besides regular taxi service.*

**Temples in and around Nashik:**

*1. Panchavati*

*2. Sri Kalaram Mandir*

*3. Ram Kunda*

*4. Ganga Godavari Temple*

*5. Sri Bala ji Temple where Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu's Footprints are their*

*6. Sri Kapileswara Temple*

*7. Sri Laxmana Ji Temple where Laxmana cut the nose of Surpanakha*

*8. Tapovana Laxmi Narayan Temple*

*9. Hare Krishna (ISKCON) Nashik - Sri Sri Madan Gopal Temple*

*10. Sri Trimakeshwar Jyotirlinga*

*11. Taket Jatayu Temple*

*12. Ramshej*

*13. Brahmagiri*



## 1. Panchavati

*This very holy place of Panchavati is where Sri Sri Sita Rama Laxmana spent about one year of their exile before Ravana kidnapped the mayaic expansion of Sita Devi from here. Laxmana built a very spacious straw-cottage there levelling and raising the clay for the raised floor of the cottage, strongly pillared with long bamboos, thereupon on those pillars excellent rafters are made, and the branches of Shamii trees are spread out, twined firmly with twines of jute strands, and with the cross-laid bamboos for thatching, and over that blades of Kusha grass and leaves of Kaasha are spread and well over-covered for the roof, and thus that very great mighty Laxmana made that best and very spacious straw-cottage with a levelled surface for residence of Raghava in the interests of Raghava alone, and it resulted as a feast to the eye [ref. Sri Garga Samhita, Canto Six, 15th chapter]. Panchavati lies across the Godavari river.*

*Glories of* Pancavati tirtha is also mentioned in Sri Garga Samhita,

*ganga-mrd-dvi-gunam punyam citrakuta-rajah smrtam*
*tasmad dasa-gunam punyam rajah pancavati-bhavam*

*"Twice as sacred as the mud of the Ganga is the dust of Citrakuta. Ten times more sacred than that is the dust of Pancavati-tirtha."*

*"In which place Vaidehi, likewise you and me too can take delight, where the woodland is scenic and the water is pleasurable, and where a water lake, ritual-firewood, flowers, and the sacred grass are available in proximity, oh, Laxmana, such a place may be searched out."* In the Ramayana, there are two chapters in *Aranya-kanda* ('The Forest Trek') that deal primarily with Panchavati: Chapter 13 (Sage Agastya directs Sri Rama to Panchavati) and Chapter 15 (The Panchavati).

### How This Place Got The Name Panchavati?

There is one beautiful story about Surya, the presiding deity of the sun planet. He had a beautiful and a chaste wife of the name Usha. And Usha had very difficult time with her

husband because he had such glaring effulgence around him, it was difficult for her to look at him. So she wanted perhaps to give her eyes rest for some time, so she came to the earth planet and began to live at the hermitage of Kanva Muni one of the great *risis*. Meanwhile Surya was very much anxious to be in the company of his consort, so he came down to the earth. As he was approaching the hermitage of Kanva Muni, Usha saw him coming and so she wanted to escape, so she took the form of the female horse, and began to run away. Surya took the form of a male horse and chased after her and he caught her, then they began to perform lovely pastimes together as horses. Now there were five Rishi Kumaras and they happened to be watching this that the great demigod Surya and his queen Usha are playing pastimes in the form of horses, so they began to laugh. Surya cursed them to become trees in that very spot, so the five Rishi Kumaras became five Banyan trees at this very place.

Since that time this place has become a very, very holy place. In fact, Sita and Rama decided to reside here during their exile and they took residence right under these five trees, just behind it you will see this temple, Sita Gumpha, it is the cave in which Sita and Rama resided while living here in Panchavati. The local people say that Lord Ramacandra delivered these 5 sages from their curse of having the tree bodies. However Lord Rama put life in these trees and thus kept them as it is for thousands of years to come.

**Sita Gumpha:** The Gumpha (Cave) is near the five Banyan trees in Panchavati. One can enter the cave with the help of a very narrow staircase. The cave has the deity of Sri Ram, Laxmana and Sita. To the left, one can enter into the cave having the Siva linga. Laxmana hid Sita in this cave while Lord Ramacandra fought with Khar, Dushan and their 14000 rakshas warriors. Ravana kidnapped Sita from the same place. Shurpanakas nose was cut around the same area.




**Five trees at Panchavati**




**Five trees at Panchavati**

**Sita Gumpha at Panchavati**



**Sita Gumpha at Panchavati where Laxmana hid Sita Devi in this cave while Lord Rama fought with Khar, Dushan and their 14000 rakshas warriors**



**Deity of Mother Sita inside Sita Gumpha at Panchavati**




**Exact spot from where mayaic expansion of Sita Devi was kidnapped by demon Ravana**




**Exact spot from where mayaic expansion of Sita Devi was kidnapped by demon Ravana**



**Ravana kidnapping mayaic expansion of Sita Devi**

**Sri Sri Sita Rama Laxmana at Panchavati**




**Panchavati Goshala**

## 2. Sri Kalaram Mandir

This is the exact place where Sita, Ram and Laxmana lived in their exile. Long ago this place was inhabited by Nagapanth sadhus. They performed devotional service to Lord Ramacandra here. Once three of these sadhus while each bathing differently at Ram Kunda, Sita Kunda and Laxmana Kunda got deities of Lord Rama, Sita and Laxmana respectively. Amazed by this appearance these wonderful black deities were brought here to be worshipped in a small hut. Over the years people noticing the beauty of the deities started visiting this place.

In 17th century Gopikabai Peshwa, mother of Madhavrao Peshwa ordered the then Sardar Rangarao Odhekar to build a temple here. Rangarao simultaneously got a dream of the Lord Ramacandra that He wanted him only to make it. The temple construction costed him 23 lakh rupees and made him penniless. The beauty of this temple is that whole structure is made from one single stone. However at the end there was still a major work left - that of installing Gold Kalash on the Gopuram temple top. As he had no money Rangarao decided to sell his wife's nose ring to make it. (In Indian custom whatever crisis may be one never sells the ladies marriage ornaments). Finally the temple was ready and true to his devotion, Rangarao did not inscribe any of his name claiming rights over the temple.

The only place where Rangarao did write his name is at the feet of the deities declaring thus that it is the right place where he should be. Hanuman deity exactly in front of the temple is unique as the head of Hanuman is in exact line of the lotus feet of the Lord Ramacandra in the temple. Sri Kalaram Mandir is truly magnificent temple built with great devotion and dedication by Rangarao in service to Lotus Feet of Lord Ramacandra.




**Sri Kalaram Temple**




**Entrance to Sri Kalaram Temple**

Sri Kalaram Temple

Their Lordships Sri Sri Sita Rama Laxmana at Sri Kalaram Temple



**Their Lordships Sri Sri Sita Rama Laxmana at Sri Kalaram Temple**

**Magnificent Sri Kalaram Temple built with great devotion and dedication by Sardar Rangarao Odhekar**



**Sri Hanuman Ji at Sri Kalaram Temple**

Hanuman deity exactly in front of the temple is unique as the head of Hanuman is in exact line of the lotus feet of the Lord Ramacandra in the temple.



**Festival time at Sri Kalaram Temple**

**Warkaries performing Harinam Sankirtana at the Temple**




**Lord Dattatreya's footprint impressions marked on a stone**

**Transcendental palanquin for Lord Ramacandra’s utsava deities at Sri Kalaram Temple**

## 3. Ram Kunda

The most important place in Panchavati is Ram kunda. It is so called because Lord Ramacandra during His exile used to take bath here. Lord Rama performed the last rites of his father Dasaratha here. Hence since then it is also known as place of immersing mortal remains (*asthi*) and performance of last rites for one’s deceased relative. A dip in this

sacred kunda is considered very auspicious here. This is also place of Kumbha Mela. *Simhastha Godavari temple* here opens only once in 12 years during Kumbha Mela.



**Ram Kunda**



**Ram Kunda**




**Lotus Feet of Lord Ramacandra at Ram Kunda**

## 4. Sri Ganga Godavari Temple

Sri Ganga Godavari Temple is a very famous Temple near Ram Kunda. Devotees take darshan of this Mandir after taking bath in the river.




**Sri Ganga Godavari Temple**


**Sri Ganga Godavari Temple**

## 5. Sri Bala ji Temple

### Where Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu's Footprints are their

Sri Bala ji Temple is next to Ram Kunda, at about 150 meters walking distance. Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's footprints are at this Temple.

Sri Balaji Temple near Ram Kunda

Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu at Sri Balaji Temple



**Lotus Footprints of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu at Sri Balaji Temple**

## 6. Sri Kapileswara Temple

*Puranas* mention that once Lord Siva saw Lord Brahma engaging in mundane talks *prajalpa*. He became angry with Lord Brahma and he cut off one of his heads which was speaking *prajalpa*. But then he was thinking that I have committed an offense against a brahmana, he was wondering how he could atone for his offense? So he travelled to many places and he could not find the solution to his dilemma. So one time he was sitting and he saw a young bull cow speaking to his mother, and the cow said that, "Our owner is very cruel and he always ties me up in a cruel way. So tomorrow I am going to kill him." So the mother cow said to her son, "that the owner is a Brahman and that it is a great offense to kill a Brahman." But the little bull said, "But I know the place where you can become relived from the offense of killing *brahmanas*." Siva was listening; he was thinking this is the answer to my great dilemma. So the next day, as the young boy predicted, everything took place and after he killed his owner, he ran and Siva began to follow. And he ran to this place "*Rama tirtha*." The place where river Godavari forms this beautiful kunda, where Lord Sri Ramacandra Himself would bathe, and they both bathed here and get freed from their sin and then Lord Siva also bathed here. So this deity of Lord Siva "Kapileshwar Mahadev" is an honor for Lord Siva's taking bath here and was freed from his sin. It is one of the only famous Siva temple here.

Sri Kapileswara Temple

Sri Kapileswara Temple

## 7. Sri Laxmana Ji Temple

**Where Laxmana cut the nose of Surpanakha**

*Laxmana Ji Temple is near the Tapovan area. This is the exact spot where Laxmana cut the nose of Surpanakha, the sister of demon Ravana. Nashik means "nose", and thus this city got its name. This is the only Temple in the world dedicated to Laxmana Ji. This is also the place where Laxmana performed tapasya to kill Ravana's son Meghnath (Indrajit). That is why this place is known as Tapovana. Close by to this temple is another temple where there is Kutir where Sri Sri Sita Rama Laxmana stayed.*

**Entrance to Sri Laxmana Temple where Laxmana cut the nose of Surpanakha, the sister of demon Ravana**




**Sri Laxmana Temple**



Sri Laxmana Ji



Laxmana cutting the nose of Surpanakha, the sister of demon Ravana

तपोवन
रावण पुत्र मेघनाथ ( इंद्रजित ) को मारने के लिए श्री
लक्ष्मणजीने इस जगह तपश्चर्या कि है। इसलिए
इस जगह का नाम तपोवन पड़ा है। और रावण कि बहन
शुर्पनखा का नाक और कान लक्ष्मणजीने यहाँ पर काटी है।
शुर्पनखा का नाक का टुकड़ा गोदावरी नदी के उसपार फेंक
दिया, इसलिए इस क्षेत्र का नाम नासिक पड़ा है। भारत में
एकमात्र यह लक्ष्मणजी का मंदीर है। यह स्थान पुराना
और पवित्र है।

**Tapovana where Laxmana performed tapasya to kill Ravana's son Meghnath (Indrajit)**




**Sri Laxmana Ji performing tapasya**

Holy tree underneath Laxmana performed tapasya

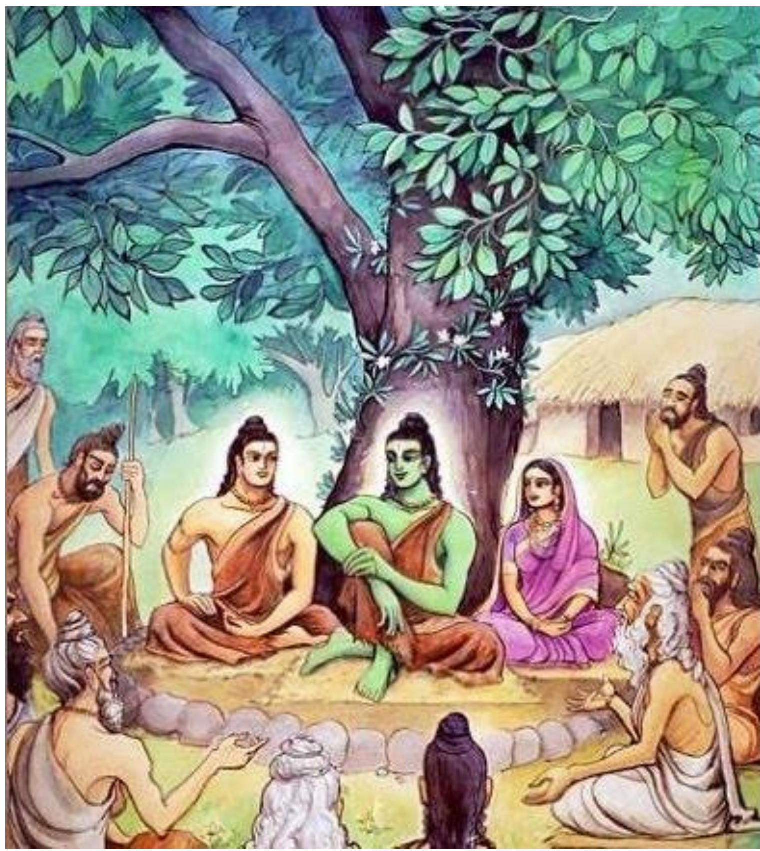
Ancient Kutir where Sri Sri Sita Rama Laxmana stayed



**Their Lordships Sri Sri Sita Rama Laxmana**

## 8. Tapovana Laxmi Narayan Temple

Sri Laxmi Narayan Temple is located near the Swaminarayan bridge of Nashik in the area of Tapovana. Tapovana is a place of penance and meditation where great sages used to practice austerities. A pastime of primary significance associated with Dandakaranya is the story of the sages of Dandakaranya, who desired to experience the rasa of conjugal love with the Lord. In days gone by there were many sages in Dandakaranya. Dandakaranya is the name of the forest where Lord Ramacandra lived after being banished by His father for 14 years. At that time there were many advanced sages who were captivated by the beauty of Lord Ramacandra and who desired to become women in order to embrace the Lord. Later on, these sages appeared in Vrindavana when Krishna advented Himself there, and they were born as *gopis*, or girlfriends of Krishna. In this way they attained the perfection of spiritual life.



**Sages of Dandakaranya meet Lord Ramacandra**

**Tapovan Laxmi Narayan Temple**

Tapovan Laxmi Narayan Temple

Sri Sri Laxmi Narayan at Tapovan Laxmi Narayan Temple

## 9. Hare Krishna (ISKCON) Nashik

*Temple address: Vrindavan colony, Gen. Vaidya nagar, Poornima Stop, Dwarka, Nashik, Maharashtra.*

ISKCON has a beautiful center in Nashik. Their Lordships Sri Sri Radha Madan Gopal are the presiding deities. Nashik is a pilgrimage center, which is famous as the location where Lord Ramacandra, Mother Sita and Laxmana had their transcendental pastimes. The history of the Krishna Consciousness movement began when Lord Caitanya visited Nashik and Trimbakeshwar 500 years ago, when He was returning from a tour of South India (CC Madhya 9.137). But the seeds of ISKCON were planted personally by the founder Acharya His Divine Grace A.C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada back in 1971. He and his American disciples performed *parikrama* of the holy places around Nashik. Srila Prabhupada preached to thousands of citizens and his American disciples distributed books and performed Nagar Sankirtan.

Officially, the activities of ISKCON started on the occasion of Prabhupada Centennial Year by H.G Paramhans Das. He preached in Nashik by himself and in 1997, he established a small center. The preaching grew mostly through youth preaching, Bhakti Vriksha programs, book distribution and simultaneous congregation development within 3-4 years. And soon in 2005, a small and beautiful temple was constructed with the help of the congregation devotees. The presiding deities of Nashik Sri Sri Gaur Nitai were welcomed in the year 1999 in a small center. The mass preaching programs were conducted regularly from 1998-1999 like Mega Janmastami Festival, Gaur Purnima, Ram Navami and Pushpa Abisheka in which thousands of people participate.

Now under the direction of H.G Shikshastakam Das, preaching is flourishing. ISKCON Nashik focuses mainly on preaching to the youth and congregation development. There are large number of full time *Bramacharis* involved in youth preaching and congregation development programs. There is regular Sunday Feast and Wednesday Gitamrita classes conducted weekly attended by hundreds of regular devotees. *IYF (ISKCON Youth Forum)* Nashik organizes monthly *Prerna festivals* for boys, and about 500 students attend it every month. *Chetna Festival* is organized for girls. IYF conducts corporate seminars for professionals and special congregation development program called *Parivartan* is organized. There is a 6 day basic Gita course for beginners; *Hare Krishna Festival* and *Bhagavat Saptah* are regularly conducted in the city. There is also *BACE facility* for the college youths where 200 college students get spiritual wisdom along with sanctified Krishna prasadam. ISKCON Nashik is distributing thousands of Srila Prabhupada's books all over the city.

The 12 years of preaching culminated in the installation of a deities of their Lordship Sri Sri Radha Madan Gopal on March 23rd 2011. ISKCON Nashik plays an active role during *Kumbha Mela* in assisting ISKCON's activities like book distribution, preaching and food for life. Nashik being a place for pilgrimage, lakhs of pilgrims regularly visit the place. Thousands of people are taking the *darshan* and the blessings of Sri Sri Radha Madan Gopal and the teachings of Srila Prabhupada for a divine, peaceful and happy life.

**ISKCON Nashik Temple**

**Their Lordships Sri Sri Radha Madan Gopal**

**His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada**
**Founder-acarya of International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)**

**Goshala at ISKCON Nashik Temple**




**Matchless Gift Shop at ISKCON Nashik Temple**

## 10. Sri Trimakeshwar Jyotirlinga

In the village of Trimbak 35 km from Nashik is the ancient temple of Trimbakeswar. Trimbakeswar is home to one of the twelve Jyotirlingas. While this temple is dedicated to Lord Siva, the presiding Deity here is Trimurti-linga, unlike the remaining eleven Jyotirlingas which all have Siva as their predominant deity. The Trimbakeswar Jyotirlinga is extraordinary in several ways. It embodies all three of the Trimurti together: Vishnu, Brahma and Siva. The lingam is comprised of three small, thumb-like *linga*, each a member of the Trimurti. They are *svayambhur* or self-manifesting. The three *lingams* are covered with a mask, usually of silver, which bears the faces of the Trimurti. On special occasions a gold mask is worn, and upon this a jeweled crown is placed. The crown, covered in precious gems, is from the age of the Pandavas.

Trimbakeshwar is the only Jyotirlinga where the *lingam* sits in a depression on the floor, rather than projecting upwards, above it. Consequently, the trilingam in the sanctum is not worshipped with *abhisheka* in the usual way. Here, there is just the bottom part of the pounding stone (ukhali), which is a depression in which the three lingams sit. The *linga* of Mahesha has a constant stream of natural water flowing over it. It is said that flames sometimes issue forth from the lingam depression, as well as a rumbling sound. Sri Trimbakeswar is worshipped here with several offerings a day. During the evening *puja*, the Deity's mask is removed and placed on a bed, in the hall of mirrors. Every Monday the silver mask is taken to the Kusavarta tank and given holy bath. A similar worship takes place with the golden mask at each Shivratri, and on the full moon day in the month of Kartika.

Trimbakeshwar (Tryambakeshwar, Trambakeshwar) takes its name from 'Trimbaka', which means The Lord who has Three Eyes. This is a place of Tri-Sandhya Gayatri, the birthplace of Lord Ganesa, and the site of the first Nath of the Nath Sampradaya. *Sinhastha Mahatmya* mentions that Lord Rama made the *yatra* at Trimbakeshwar. Trimbakeshwar is

also considered to be one of the holiest places to perform *Shraddha*. The Nirnaya Sindhu mentions Trimbakeshwar as the place where Sahyadri Mountain and Godavari River exist, purifying the entire earth planet.

Trimbakeswar Temple, which is constructed of black stone, is an imposing architectural monument. It is set against a backdrop of the Brahmagiri, a sacred hill from which three separate sources of the Godavari River emerge, flowing in three directions. The stream flowing east is called Godavari, the one flowing south is Vaitarna, and the third is called the west-flowing Ganga, which meets the Godavari near Chakra Tirth. The River Ahilya also meets the Godavari in front of the Trimbakeshwar Temple.

Kushavarta kunda is a large area. The tank was built up with stone pavement and verandahs on all sides. There the sage Gautama had his *ashrama* in Trimbakeshwar and during a 24-year period of drought, his pious credits caused Varuna to make the rains fall here. Indra became envious of the boon being enjoyed by Gautama, and caused even more rain to fall. Later, Gautama engaged in the episode of accidentally killing a cow, and in penance he performed austerities on the peak of the Brahmagiri. His prayers to Siva resulted in the Ganges manifesting here, at Trimbak Tirth. Taking bath in this Kusavarta, Gautama was able to rid himself of the sin of killing a cow. Kusavarta kund is considered to be the symbolic origin of the Godavari. There are temples at the four corners of the kund. On the southeast corner is the temple of Kedareshwar Mahadev, who in disguise of Kedarbhatta made Gautama bathe in the waters and gave him prayaschitta for the sin of killing a cow. To the southwest is Sakshi Vinayak, who is a witness to the *yatra-vidhi* of all pilgrims. To the northwest is Kusheshwar Mahadev and to the northeast is the temple of Godavari.

The work of constructing the present main temple of Trimbakeshwar, built with black basalt, was begun by Shrimant Balaji Bajirao, the Nanasahib Peshwa, in 1755 and was completed in 1786, at a cost of 16 lacs. The Siva deity installed in the temple at that time was decorated with a world famous gem - the Nassak diamond. The stone was appropriated by the British during the 3rd Anglo-Maratha war. Trimbakeshwar Temple was built in the Nagara style. It is surrounded by a massive stone wall. A large Nandi sits in front of the temple, while a second beautiful marble Nandi is found inside. The *garbha griha* is square internally, but is star-shaped externally. The porches have pillars and arches. The structure is replete with intricate sculptural work of scrolls, floral ornaments, and figures of various transcendental personalities and scenes.

The *Triambaka-lingam* is housed in the sanctum, crowned with a graceful tower, a large *amalaka* and a golden *kalasha*. In front of the *garbagriha* and the *antarala* there is a mandap with doors on four sides, three of which are covered with porches. The roof of the *mandapam* is a curvilinear slab, rising in steps. Outside the temple is another area with *linga* and *yoni* installed, and separate pujas are done here. To the rear of the temple's Ganga Mandir is a large caravansary, where Rama and Karpureshwar Mahadev are enthroned. There is also a separate temple of Ashwini Kumar in front of Ganga Mandir, temples of Jwareshwar Mahadev and Kanchaneshwar, and *murtis* of the Dasavatara and thirty-three other divine personalities. It is said that by Lord Siva's order, all the deities stay here in person during the period of *Sinhastha Parva*, coming to purify themselves.



Sri Trimbakeswar Jyotirlinga

Kushavart Kund in Trimbakeshwar

## 11. Taket Jatayu Temple

Taket about 70km from Nashik is the place where Lord Ramacandra met Jatayu the eagle bird, as per Valmiki Ramayana.

**Taket where Lord Ramacandra met Jatayu**

**Taket**

Lord Ramacandra, Laxmana and Jatayu

Taket



**Taket**

## 12. Ramshej

At about 14 km from Nashik, Ramshej is situated on Dindori road. Lord Ramacandra has rested here during His exile, and hence the place is named Ramshej (where Lord Ram rested).

## 13. Brahmagiri

Brahmagiri is situated in Trimbakeshwar village. It is considered to be the mountain form of Lord Siva and the fact that River Godavari originates here. Every Monday during the month of Shravan, lakhs of devotees take a circumambulation of Brahmagiri. There are two *pradakshina* routes around *Trimbakeswar Ksetra*. One circumambulates Brahmagiri, while the other goes around Hariharagiri. There are a great many temples, shrines and *thirthas* all in close proximity to the Trimbakeshwar Temple complex. The town has a large population of Brahmin households, so there are many Gurukuls and learning centers. The place is also famous for the opulent religious practices (vidhis) performed by *brahmanas*, who have specialized in them. *Narayan-Nagbali, Kalsarpa Shanti, Tripindi vidhi* are done here.

While popularly known as the Nashik Mela, Trimbakeshwar is actually the location of the Kumbha Mela. Held once every 12 years during *Simhasta Parvani*, when Jupiter enters Leo, all the sacred waters gather together here in the Kusavarta kunda. Over 3.5 million devotees throng to Trimbakeshwar for this great Mela. Maha Siva Ratri and Rathayatra are also held here.

**The location of Kusavarta is established in Sri Caitanya-Caritamrta Madhya Lila 9:** "He entered Dandakaranya and liberated the seven palm trees. From there He visited a place known as Pampa-sarovara and visited Pancavati, Nashik, Brahmagiri and also the source of the Godavari River, Kusavarta. Thus the Lord visited almost all the holy places in

South India. He finally returned to Jagannatha Puri by taking the same route, after visiting Vidyanagara again." [*Madhya Lila 9 Summary]*

Later, in Madhya 9.317, we get further details on this *tirtha*: Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu then visited Nashika, where He saw the deity of Tryambaka [Lord Siva]. He then went to Brahmagiri and then to Kusavarta, the source of the river Godavari. Purport: Kusavarta is located in the western *ghata*, at Sahyadri. It is near Nashik, a holy place, but according to some it was situated in the valley of Vindhya."




**Brahmagiri**

## Glories of Panchavati

In the Ramayana, there are two chapters in Aranya-kanda ('The Forest Trek') that deal primarily with Pancavati: Chapter 13 (Sage Agastya directs Sri Rama to Panchavati) and Chapter 15 (The Panchavati). In the following excerpts from these two chapters, we find a beautiful narrative describing the glories of *Pancavati-tirtha*, why Rama chose it for His abode during exile, and how Laxmana prepared a cottage for Rama, Sita Devi and himself there:

“Then that eminent sage Agastya on contemplating a while about what Rama has said, that virtuous and confident sage spoke more ideational word to Rama. A most prosperous place called Panchavati is there at a distance of two *yojanas* from here, oh, dear Rama, which is abundant with tubers, fruits, water, and many deer." Thus Agastya started to tell, *“That woodland will be delightful isn't it Raghava, for it is praiseworthy and not very far off from here, and Seetha can take delight in there. There Maithili will take delight nearby River Godavari, and it is with abundant tubers, fruits, various are its bird flocks, and it is very reclusive too, oh, great dexterous Rama, further it is meritorious and appealing. Oh, brave one, you see this great forest of flower-liquor trees, you have to proceed north of it and advance towards a banyan tree. Then on climbing up an upland a mountain is seen, that which is also not far away, and that renowned Panchavati is there in an ever-blooming forest in the valley of that mountain."*

When thus said by Sage Agastya, Rama along with Soumitri venerated and bade farewell to that truth advocator sage Agastya. Thus well bidden by Sage Agastya those two Rama and Laxmana have offered their venerations at the feet of that sage and proceeded to their prospective hermitage at Panchavati along with Seetha. Then on going to Panchavati which is full with many serpents and predators, Rama said to splendidly brilliant Laxmana. "We arrived at the place as indicated by the sage, oh, gentle Laxmana, this region with its flowered forests is Panchavati. In which place we have to situate our hermitage for our liking, for that cast your sight all over the forest, and indeed you are an expert in such matters. In which place Vaidehi, likewise you and me too can take delight, where the woodland is scenic and the water is pleasurable, and where a water lake, ritual-firewood, flowers, and the sacred grass are available in proximity, oh, Laxmana, such a place may be searched out. When thus said by Rama, Laxmana adjoined his palms and said this sentence to Rama in the presence of Seetha. I am but a dependent, as long as you are there, may it be for innumerable years, I am your adherent, Rama, therefore you yourself tell me to build hermitage in such and such delightful place. "

Rama is gladdened by those words of that great resplendent Laxmana, and he selected a place that comprised of all the attributes. This is an evenly and propitious place surrounded with flowered trees and it is apt of you to erect hermitage here, traditionally. This pleasing lake is seen here adjacently, beaming forth with its lotuses that are similar to sun in resplendence, and that are scented fragrantly. This River Godavari is also seen from here, surrounded by blooming trees, spread over with swans, and beautified with kaarandava, and chakravaaka birds, as that contemplated soul sage Agastya had said. Those soaring mountains are appearing beautiful with many caves, surrounded by flowered trees, flurried by animal herds, sounded by peacocks, and they are neither far-off nor very nearby. Here and there are the golden, silvery and coppery ores on the mountains, and they are shining forth like cow-eye ventilators on walls and also like the superb paintings on elephants. These mountains are brightening with trees of Saala, Palmyra, Tamaala, Date Palms, Jackfruit and also thus with Punnaagaa. With Chuuta - Sweet Mango, Ashoka, Tialaka, even with Ketaka, Champaka trees, And even with Syandana, Sandalwood, Niipa, Paarnasa, Lakuch, dhava, Ashwakarna, Khadira, Shamii, Kimshuka, Paatala trees, and entwined are those and those trees with flowered shrubs, and along with climbers, and thus they brighten the mountains. This place is holy, this is delightful and this is with many animals and birds, hence Soumitri, let us reside here along with this bird Jatayu. Thus said by Rama to that remover of foe's valor and one with very great might, namely Laxmana, he briskly erected a hermitage for his brother.

## Lord Caitanya visits Panchavati

Working His way back towards Jagannatha Puri from the southern states, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu visited Pancavati-tirtha in Maharashtra. Pancavati is mentioned in the Summary of *Caitanya Caritamrta Madhya Lila 9*: *"The Lord then visited Tapi, Mahismati-pura, the Narmada River and Rsyamuka-parvata. He entered Dandakaranya and liberated seven palm trees. From there He visited a place known as Pampa-sarovara and visited Pancavati, Nasika, Brahmagiri and also the source of the Godavari River, Kusavarta. Thus the Lord visited almost all the holy places in South India." [Madhya 9 Summary]* This part of Lord Caitanya's journey is further described in Madhya Lila 9.316: *"Eventually Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu arrived at a lake known as Pampa, where He took His bath. He then went to a place called Pancavati, where He rested."*

## Lord Balarama and Nityananda Prabhu visited Dandakaranya

Both Lord Balarama and Nityananda Prabhu visited the holy site of Dandakaranya. In *Srimad-Bhagavatam 10.79.19-21* we read of Lord Balarama's travels: *"The Supreme Lord then traveled through the kingdoms of Kerala and Trigarta, visiting Lord Siva's sacred city*

*of Gokarna, where Lord Dhurjati [Siva] directly manifests himself. After also visiting Goddess Parvati, who dwells on an island, Lord Balarama went to the holy district of Surparaka and bathed in the Tapi, Payoshni and Nirvindhya rivers. He next entered the Dandaka forest and went to the river Reva, along which the city of Mahishmati is found. Then He bathed at Manu-tirtha and finally returned to Prabhasa."* In Krishna Book Chapter 79, Srila Prabhupada further describes Lord Balarama's visit to Dandakaranya, *'The Liberation of Balvala, and Lord Balarama's touring the Sacred Places'*. Here, Srila Prabhupada confirms that the Dandakaranya Forest at Nashik was the place of Lord Rama's exile.

*The travels of Nityananda Prabhu are described in Sri Caitanya Bhagavata:* "Gaya, Kasi, Prayaga, Mathura, Dwarka, and Nara-Narayana asrama were magnanimously visited. He further visited the place of the Buddhists, the residence of Vyasa, as well as Ranganatha, Setubandha and the Malaya Hills. He then went to Anantapura and fearlessly travelled through uninhabited forests. He visited the Gomati, Gandaki, Sarayu and Kaveri Rivers, and travelled to Ayodhya and the Dandakaranya forest. He went to Trimalla, Vyenkatanatha, Sapta-Godavari, the abode of Mahesa, and Kanyakumari. He visited the Reva, Mahismati, Malla-Tirtha and Hardwar, where the Ganga descended in ancient times. In this way Nityananda Raya, after travelling to all the holy places, returned to Mathura."

## Kumbha Mela - Nashik



**Kumbha Mela Nashik**

**Kumbha Mela:** Millions of years ago, the most powerful beings in the universe, known as the *devas (demigods)* and the *asuras (demons)*, fought in the heavens over a pot of immortal nectar. During their twelve-day battle, some of the nectar spilled onto four places in India: Allahabad and Hardwar in Uttar Pradesh, Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh, and Nashik in Maharashtra. According to the Vedic texts, a day in heaven equals a year on earth. So once every 12 years the nectar still pours onto these four sites, during certain planetary configurations. At these times, millions of people come to partake of the nectar

by bathing in the holy rivers and drinking the sacred water. These gatherings of pilgrims are known as the Kumbha Mela *("festivals of the pots")*.

There is this story in which the Suras and the Asuras have a great battle and the Asuras had taken control and defeated the demigods. So they approached the Supreme Lord Narayana, praying for his mercy. Lord told them, that they should make a treaty with the demons and together work to churn the ocean of milk using the Mandara Mountain as a churning rod and the serpent Vasuki as the rope. And by churning the ocean of milk the nectar of immortality would come. So out of great desire to achieve this *amrut* (nectar) the demigods agreed and the demons agreed to cooperate with the demigods to this great churning of the ocean of milk. This is a very long and beautiful story. When they first started churning it, the mountain started sinking deeper and deeper. The demigods and the demons were helpless. The demigods began to pray to the Lord. So the Lord incarnated as Kurma-avatar, a very gigantic tortoise and he lay under the mountain and He became the pivot, in which the mountain was resting. And it is described that this mountain was so huge all the demigods and all the demons could not lift it, the Lord Himself had to lift it and bring it there. But for Kurma with this great mountain scratching on His back, He felt very satisfied, because by His own divine will He had an itch on his back at the time and he felt that the demigods and the demons were together and scratching at His back. The churning went on, and then the mountain started going this way and that way, couldn't keep it steady. So then they had to call out the Supreme Lord. So the Lord appeared as Ajitha (unconquerable) and stood on the top of the mountain holding it in one place. Then they began to churn it again and the first thing that happened is Vasuki became very much exhausted by being used this rope, so fire started pouring out of his mouth, producing great heat. So then the Lord incarnated in the mode of ignorance, passion and goodness; to give relief to this serpent Vasuki as well as the demons and the demigods. And then they began to churn again, the first thing that came out as part of that churning was this poison called Hala-hala, and this poison was so powerful that just its vapors would have destroyed all life in the whole universe. So then, they all began to pray to the Lord Vishnu and Vishnu told the demigods that they should go to Lord Siva, he will save u. so they approached Lord Siva and out of compassion for all living beings, Lord Siva drank all the poisons and his throat became black and he became known as Kalakanta or Nilakanta. And this is a decoration showing that Lord Siva was willing to perform the greatest service to the Lord, of really being willing to risk his life to be compassionate to other living beings.

They continued the churning as so many wonderful things came out, the horse Uchaishrava appeared and that was given to Bali Maharaj to be his horse and then Airavatha, the elephant came out and that was claimed by Indra to be his carrier and then Surabhi cow came out and that was given to the Brahmins and rishis to perform *yajna*. And beautiful apsaras, everything was coming out and everyone involved was claiming proprietorship over various gifts from the churning of the ocean of milk and then Lakshmi Devi came out. Lakshmi Devi appeared in this world through the churning of the ocean of milk and everyone wanted to marry Lakshmi, because she was so beautiful. All the men of both, the demons and the demigods were proposing to her, and they were all hoping that she would stop and accept them. But she just walked passed everyone and went right to Ajitha, Narayana the Supreme Personality of Godhead and placed the garland of victory over Him. Then there was a wonderful wedding ceremony of Lakshmi-Narayan. And when they continued churning, ultimately the goal that they all had to achieve - Amrut came out from the ocean of milk. The beautiful avatar of Lord Vishnu of the name Dhanavantari was holding a beautiful golden pot and in that pot was the nectar of immortality, which can give a person, who tastes it, great power. The demons wanted it, the power to conquer. The demigods wanted it, the power to maintain and control. The devotees wanted, simply because it's the prasad of the Lord, to purify their hearts. So immediately the demons who are more powerful than demigods at that times, they

attacked Dhanavantari and dragged the pot of nectar from His hands. So again the demigods were in great distress, they have already been defeated. Now the demons will became millions of times more powerful when they drink this nectar, so they began to pray to Lord Vishnu. And then Vishnu incarnated as Mohini Murti, the most beautiful female form that the eyes could behold and immediately upon seeing Her, all the demons wanted Her to be their own. She was glancing at each one of them, so each one was thinking, that she loves only me, she doesn't like anyone else and she is attracted to me. So everyone was convinced, every one of the demons that she will chose me to be her husband. And she was smiling at them very nicely and meanwhile the demons were fighting over that they want to drink first the nectar, but they couldn't get amongst each other. They were fighting, who to take it first and they were grabbing from one another and no one was getting it. Everything is the property of God in this world, yet the demoniac mentality claims, everybody is trying to claim proprietorship over God's property and nations are fighting and individuals are fighting, everyone is fighting over what belongs to God. So this is the nature of demons or the demoniac mentality.

So finally Mohini was so beautiful that they decided unanimously, that whoever Mohini Murti gives the nectar first we all agree with. But each one of them were thinking that she loves only me, so I will get the nectar. "So Mohini please, we will give the nectar to you and you decide who gets it." So She began to speak in bewildering words, she said "why you are trusting me, I'm a women without any escort coming to a place like this. you should not trust me, I may cheat you." And they all began to laugh, "Yes you are speaking very nicely." So then she took the nectar and she began to pour in the mouths of all demigods and all the demons were so much attracted to Her, attached to Her that they were afraid to say anything against Her. But then Rahu disguised himself as demigod and sat right next to Chandra and Surya and then nectar went into his mouth and then Chandra said "this is my enemy Rahu." So Mohini Murti cut off his head with Sudharsana Chakra.

Every 12 years the nectar rises and anyone who bathes in water at that times gets great-great material and spiritual benefits according to your consciousness. When Lord Ramacandra was living here in Panchavati He would daily take His bath in this Ram Kunda and this is also the place where drop of nectar fell.

## Story Related to Godavari River

Lord Brahma worshipped Lord Trivikram in Satya Loka with the same holy water of the Ganges which came from his lotus feet. He wanted to get the river Ganges to come in the material realm and that Lord Shankar should hold it on his head, to flow. Brahma's benediction was fulfilled. However seeing River Ganges in the form of a woman closely associating her with husband Shankar, Parvati was unhappy. She planned to drive Ganges away from her husband.
As part of the plan Parvati and her son Ganesh came to live in Gautama's ashrama with Parvati's friend Jaya. There was a famine of 24 years and people were affected by the pangs of hunger. However, Varun, the demigod of Rains, pleased with Sage Gautama arranged rains every day in Gautama's *Ashrama* (dwelling place) which was in Trimbakeshwar. Gautama used to sow rice in the surrounding fields of his *Ashrama* in the morning, reap the crop in the afternoon and with it fed a large group of *risis*, who took shelter in his *Ashrama* on account of the famine. The blessings of the group of *risis* increased the merit (*punya*) of Gautama. King Indra's position became shaky because of his increased merit. So Indra ordered clouds to rain all over Trimbakeshwar, so that the famine will be over and Rishis will go back and the increasing merits of Gautama will be weakened. Although the famine was over, Gautam urged the Rishis to stay back and kept on feeding them and gaining merit.

However once he saw a cow grazing in the paddy field and he drove her away by throwing Darbha (sharp, pointed grass). The slender cow died by this. It was Jaya, Parvati's friend, who had taken the form of a cow. This news upset the Rishis and they refused to luncheon at his Ashram. Gautama requested Rishis to show a way out of this sin.
He was advised to approach Lord Siva and request him to release Ganges and a bath in the Ganges would set him free of his sins. Gautama then practiced penance by going to the peak of Brahmagiri. Lord Shankara was pleased by his worships and gave him the Ganges.

However, Ganges was not prepared to part with Lord Siva, which irritated him. He made *Tandav Nrutya* (dance) on the peak of Brahmagiri and dashed his *jata* (hair) there. Frightened by this action, Ganges appeared on Brahmagiri. Later on Ganges appeared in the Trimbak Tirtha. Gautama praised her but she off and on appeared on the mountain at various places and disappeared in anger.

Gautama could not bathe in her waters. Ganges then appeared in Gangadwar, Varaha-tirtha, Rama-Laxmana tirtha, Ganga Sagar tirtha. Still Gautama could not bathe in her waters. Then Gautama surrounded the river with enchanted grass and put a vow to her. The flow stopped there and the *tirtha* thus came to be called Kushavarta. It is from this Kushavarta that the river Godavari flows up to the sea. The sin of killing a cow by Gautama was wiped off here.

**Directions to reach Nashik:**
Nashik is in Maharashtra 3 hour drive from Mumbai and 4 hours from Pune (210 km). Nearest airport is Mumbai or Pune. There are a number of trains that connect Nashik to other cities and towns. There are several private luxury video coach and state buses available between Nashik and cities like Pune, Shirdi, Aurangabad and Mumbai. Maharashtra State Transport buses connect Nashik to distant places of Maharashtra. Regular Taxi service is also available between Nashik and Mumbai or Nashik and Pune.



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